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DEVELOPMENT IN THE TIDEWATER COUNTIES OF VIRGINIA

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About fifty years ago occurred the emancipation of four million slaves. Prior to the general emancipation there were in each state, and perhaps in each county of the Southern States, a few who were called free Negroes. The only difference in the two classes of Negroes was that one was without task-masters, though subject to all the hardships of slavery save the task-master. A few of these free Negroes in each county owned a small acreage. At the close of the Civil War, as far as our records disclose, the free Negroes owned 537 acres of land in Gloucester County. This information is not claimed to be thoroughly accurate because of the destruction of the records during the Civil War. Even the United States Government, prior to 1880, as far as my information goes, had not seen fit to tabulate Negro ownership of land.

In every clerk's office, if not destroyed, will be found copies of the United States census report for the year 1880. While these reports do not tabulate Negro ownership of land, they do with the aid of old citizens give such information as enables us to come to some definite conclusion as to land ownership by Negroes. This census report shows that in Gloucester County there were 195 Negroes who owned about 2300 acres of land. There were others who had begun to buy but whose titles were not perfected. The legislature of 1890-1891 provided for the separate enlistment of property by the two races. Since that time we have been able to give some definite idea of the ownership of land in Virginia. Each year there has been a general increase in the ownership of land in all the Tidewater counties. The auditor's report of 1912 shows that there are 132,897 acres of land in Gloucester County. Of this amount the Negro holding has increased from 2,300 acres in 1880 to 19,772 acres in 1912, valued at \$139,619 with improvements valued at \$122,444. Prior to 1880 there were no buildings and improvements worth counting on the land owned

by Negroes. The great bulk of them lived in one room log cabins. I have designated for convenience sake the following counties as "Tidewater" counties, viz., Accomac, Caroline, Charles City, Elizabeth City, Essex, Gloucester, Isle of Wight, James City, King and Queen, King William, Lancaster, Mathews, Middlesex, Nansemond, New Kent, Norfolk, Northampton, Northumberland, Richmond, Princess Anne, Southampton, Warwick, Westmoreland and York. At the close of the war it is fair to estimate in the absence of any definite record that the Negroes in these twenty-four counties owned less than 5,000 acres of land. Their holdings have increased during this period of fifty years from about 5,000 acres, whose estimated value with improvements was less than \$70,000, to 421,465 acres, whose value with improvements according to the auditor, is \$4,282,947. According to the auditor of Virginia for 1912 the Negroes own in the whole state 1,629,626 acres valued at \$8,664,625, and the total value of Negro farm lands in Virginia with improvements thereon is \$14,156,757.

These farm lands are increasing in value year by year due to the increased knowledge of agriculture by the great bulk of Negroes. The census reports for 1900 show that there were 44,834 Negro farmers in the state. Of this number 26,566 owned their lands while 17,030 were renters. The census of 1910 tells us there were 48,114 Negro farmers in the state. Of this number 32,228 owned their farms while 15,706 rented. Of these 32,228 farms, 26,200 are free of mortgage or debt, leaving but 5,609 mortgaged. There may be some discrepancy in the value as estimated by the census bureau and that by the auditor of public accounts. The auditor fixes his value for taxation and the Negro holdings are put upon the same footing with white holdings to evade taxation, while the census bureau fixes its basis of valuation by the actual observation of the enumerators as they go upon those farms.

The period from 1900 to 1910, according to the census bureau, shows that the increase of Negro farm owners is 21.3 per cent. It is also shown that 67 per cent of the Negro farmers of Virginia own their farms while the census of 1900 shows 59.3 per cent. Gloucester County, for the size of its acreage and Negro population has perhaps the largest number of Negro land owners of any one county in the state. We have shown that in 1880 there were 195 while today there are 1895 Negro land owners.

The greatest agency employed in the development of the Tidewater counties, in fact of the state of Virginia, in educational and material conditions, is the Hampton Normal School located at Hampton, Va. For forty or more years this school has been sending out its graduates until every county in the Tidewater section, and many other counties in the state, have Hampton graduates with the Hampton spirit. They go forth to make peace and cultivate the most friendly feeling between the races. Another branch of this agency now employed in the development of the soil is Hampton's direct agents and graduates who live among the people, and the coöperative demonstration farm work as carried on in coöperation with the Hampton School and the United States Department of Agriculture. Mr. J. B. Pierce, a Hampton graduate, is the director of the demonstration work in Virginia.

Nothing could show progress more than the increased output of farm products, the accumulation of improved farm implements and improved stock. The outgrowth of this development is the great number of bank deposits in the banks of Tidewater, especially those located in the rural districts. I am informed that the Negroes of Gloucester County have on savings deposits in the bank at Gloucester Court House more than \$20,000, not to say anything about the running accounts in the two banks in the county. In 1880 there was not a Negro in Gloucester depositing in any bank and few in all Tidewater, Va. The increase in the accumulation of town and city property has followed close in the wake of the rural sections. In 1880 they owned few town or city lots. Today the town lots with improvements are valued at \$3,134,008, while the city lots are valued at \$3,164,272, with improvements valued at \$5,140,335. At the close of the war it is fair to presume, in the absence of records, that the entire Negro population of Virginia did not pay taxes on \$1,000,000 worth of property; today, according to the auditor, they pay taxes on real property valued at \$25,595,402. I have referred to the possible discrepancy as estimated by the state and census bureaus. The census bureau for 1910 puts the value of all farms owned by Negroes in Virginia at \$28,059,538, while the auditor, as just stated, collects from the Negroes taxes on realty valued at \$25,595,402.

For the comforts of life and as a mark of increased civilization the personal property owned by any race is a fair test. Fifty years

ago the Negroes of these Tidewater counties owned but little personal property. Their furniture consisted of old chests, boxes and roughly made bureaus, bedsteads and the like. Today such property as they then had, save, perhaps, one feather bed and two pillows usually held by each family, would not be assessed at any value. The character of personal property, such as house furniture, cooking utensils and the like, now possessed by them, is such as is produced in some of the best factories of the country. Many of these homes have in them up-to-date musical instruments. Pleasure carriages and buggies are among the advanced acquisitions. It is well-nigh impossible to give accurately the value of the personal property year by year. I have taken the auditor's report for 1904 as the first basis of improvement in the acquisition of personal property. By this report it will be seen that the Negroes of these twenty-four counties pay taxes on personal property valued at \$1,771,358. The auditor's report for 1912 shows that the Negroes in these 24 counties paid over to the state \$20,818.24, the amount from taxes assessed on personal property.

We hear a great deal about the race problem. The problem becomes more acute as race prejudice increases. The Negroes of these Tidewater counties, in fact all over the state, have been greatly encouraged in their efforts to accumulate property and to become substantial citizens by the best element of native white people. The encouragement given by the better element of the white people has meant more to the Negro than it is possible to estimate. I do not mean by this that the Negro has been accorded all of his rights. With the same friendly feeling and the same anxiety on the part of the better element of white people to see the Negro have fair play as to home making and character building, there is a great future for further development of these Tidewater counties.